

# Behind the 1940-41 Ban on the Khaksar Tehrik

*In Memory of the Khaksar Martyrs of March 19, 1940*

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On March 19, 1940, the Khaksar Tehrik (Movement) was banned by the Government of Punjab in British India, and Allama Mashriqi, his sons, and a very large number of Khaksars were imprisoned. In 1941, the Movement was banned on an all-India basis. Investigative research reveals that the ban on the Khaksar Tehrik and Mashriqi's imprisonment were the result of mutual interest of the anti-Khaksar elements, including the British and the All-India Muslim League (AIML). Both saw Mashriqi and his Movement as a threat and sought to secure themselves. The following briefly sheds light on British and AIML motivations and the subsequent banning of the Khaksar Movement.

## ***British Alarmed by the Khaksar Tehrik***

In the beginning of 1939, Allama Inayatullah Khan Al-Mashriqi (founder of the Khaksar Tehrik) announced in *Al-Islah* (Khaksar weekly)<sup>1</sup> that, by 1940, the Tehrik would achieve its final objective. In other words, Mashriqi would bring down the British rule in India and liberate his nation. He also declared that if he failed, he would disband the Movement. To Mashriqi, ten years (referring to the start of the Tehrik in 1930) was more than enough for any Movement to accomplish its aim, or there would remain no justification to continue such an organization. Towards the end of 1939, Mashriqi ordered the Khaksars to enroll an additional 2.5 million members within the next six months, i.e. by June 1940. This was the time when the Khaksar Tehrik had already spread to every nook of India, and foreign branches had also been established. Mashriqi was very close to his goal.

The Government agencies had been monitoring Khaksar activities, and its growth had become a matter of concern for the British. This is evident from the Governor of Punjab's (Sir Henry Duffield Craik) letter dated August 11, 1939 to the Viceroy of India (Lord Linlithgow): "This movement [Khaksar] is particularly prominent...I have sent the Premier [Sir Sikander Hayat Khan] a note on the subject." In another letter (dated September 13, 1939) to the Viceroy, the Governor of Punjab considered the Tehrik to be "the most troublesome." Further investigation of Government of British India's official documents uncovers that the Government considered the Khaksar Movement to be threatening and most dangerous.

It is important to mention here that the Khaksar discipline, militant ability, and potential to bring down British rule was actually revealed to the authorities during the Khaksar Tehrik and the Government of United Provinces (U.P.)'s conflict over the Sunni-Shia riots in Lucknow in 1939. Inadvertently, this confrontation took place around the same time as the start of World War II (WWII). The conflict resulted in the resignation of the Congress Ministry in U.P., and the Provincial Government had to sign an agreement on November 04, 1939 with Khaksar leaders on Khaksar terms to end the discord. This is evident from the Governor of U.P.'s (Harry Graham Haig) letter dated November 08, 1939 to the Viceroy of India:

“The Khaksar problem was also a great embarrassment. I telegraphed to you on November 2nd that the situation involved embarrassments and that I proposed to accept the resignation of the Ministers next morning... the Ministers felt their position and authority were being jeopardised and questioned ...I had decided regretfully to accept the resignation of the Ministers... We also agreed to pay the fares of the men [Khaksars who had come to Lucknow from other provinces] back to their homes. I should have preferred to omit both these terms, but it was clear that if we wanted an immediate settlement we would have to accept something on these lines and I felt it was better to settle at once than to run the risk of long discussions with a possibly doubtful issue...”<sup>2</sup>

Khaksar power can also be seen through the Viceroy of India’s secret letter (dated November 13, 1939) to the Governor of U.P, soon after the agreement between the two parties was reached. Linlithgow wrote “...I confess that I should be greatly relieved, as I regard it [Khaksar Tehrik] myself as having quite dangerous potentialities, to be free of it [Khaksar Tehrik].”<sup>3</sup>

This revelation of Khaksar power coupled with Mashriqi’s program made the British enormously nervous. A few days (August 28, 1939) before WWII, J.C. Donaldson (Secretary to the Governor of U.P.) wrote a secret letter to Sir John Gilbert Laithwaite (Secretary to the Viceroy of India). He stated that the Khaksar Tehrik “has dangerous possibilities” and that the Government is wary of the Movement.<sup>4</sup>

This changing dynamic in India tied with the onset of WWII in 1939 made the Government of British India fearful of losing authority over the country. The Khaksar power and the war made the British position extremely vulnerable. Thus, it was considered imminent to ban the Khaksar Movement, and other prompt steps were also taken to eliminate this threat.

### ***The Muslim League Leadership’s Motivations***

Mashriqi’s popularity and the Khaksar strength were also considered a threat to the growth and political aims of the All-India Muslim League’s leadership. Among the leaders, who felt threatened and were hostile towards Mashriqi, were Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah and Premier of the Punjab, Sir Sikander Hayat Khan (member of the Working Committee of the AIML).

Jinnah’s hostility toward Mashriqi was indicative of his fear of being side-lined. The Viceroy’s letter (dated March 16, 1940) to the Governor of North West Frontier Province (Sir George Cunningham) explains what Jinnah thought of Mashriqi: “in the course of our discussion...I did not get the impression that Jinnah himself had any very high opinion of Inayatullah’s balance...” On the same day, the Viceroy wrote a secret letter to the Governor of Punjab (Sir Henry Duffield Craik); according to this letter, Quaid-e-Azam spoke ill of Mashriqi, referring to him as “rather crackbrained.”<sup>5</sup> These letters were written only days before the ban was imposed on the Khaksar Tehrik and atrocities were inflicted on the Khaksars and their leader. Quaid-e-Azam’s mindset can be further understood via the Governor of Punjab, Sir Henry Duffield Craik’s, letter to Linlithgow (dated March 25, 1940). Craik wrote a gist of his conversation with Jinnah, which he had had a few hours before the Pakistan Resolution was passed:

“Jinnah then went on to speak of his interviews with Inayatullah [Allama Mashriqi] at Delhi and admitted that he was hardly sane, extremely difficult to reason with and dangerously fanatical... He then went on to say that he hoped to be able to find sober and responsible men... to assume

direction and control over it [Tehrik]... Actually I [Governor] fancy he [Jinnah] visualises the Khaksars as a potentially powerful propaganda agency on behalf of the Muslim League. He [Jinnah] expressed the hope that if he was able to accomplish what he had in mind, my [Governor] Ministry would agree to rescind their order declaring the Khaksars an unlawful association. At the same time he admitted that the military side of the Khaksars' activities, *i.e.*, drilling, sham fights, &c, was a menace to the public peace and could not be permitted."<sup>6</sup>

By making such remarks, Jinnah paved the way to strengthen his own political position and made a tactful attempt to side-line Mashriqi. Quaid-e-Azam sought to remove Mashriqi from politics so as to remove a threat to his own political career. Moreover, he intended to bring the Khaksar Tehrik under the League's flag to augment the League's position. In addition to the letter above, the following offers proof in this regard. The Governor of North West Frontier Province's Report dated April 09, 1940 stated "they [Muslim Leaguers] are attempting to bring the organisation [Khaksar Tehrik] more under the discipline of the [Muslim] League."<sup>7</sup>

It was not only Quaid-e-Azam who was against Mashriqi. Punjab Premier Sir Sikander Hayat Khan also considered Mashriqi a direct threat to his political career in Punjab. He detested Mashriqi and the Khaksar Tehrik's popularity. Sir Sikander's enmity is visible from what the Khaksar leader Raja Sher Zaman wrote in his book: Sir Sikander once said "I will crush the Khaksars within two days."<sup>8</sup> Sikander's hostility can also be gauged from the antagonistic actions he took against Mashriqi and the Khaksar Tehrik on March 19, 1940 and thereafter.

The above offers proof that these leaders of the AIML were anti-Khaksars. It was in their vital interest to eliminate Mashriqi, who was a threat to them, and also seek British blessings for removing the Khaksar threat in the crucial time of WWII. Such circumstantial evidence substantiated by historical documents speaks to the All-India Muslim League's behind the scenes desire for the ban against the Khaksar Movement.

### ***Towards Banning the Khaksar Tehrik***

Quaid-e-Azam was not part of the Government, and Sir Sikander Hayat Khan was delegated the authority to deal with the Khaksars. Sir Sikander was the right hand man of the British, as is evident from the Viceroy's letter to the Governor of Bombay, written four days after the ban on March 23, 1940: Sir Sikander "is one of the best people we have."

Soon after the green signal from the British, Sir Sikander started to prepare ground for imposing the ban. Non-Khaksar newspapers were encouraged to print articles against the Movement, and anti-Khaksar propaganda became a regular feature. An article even appeared in *The Tribune* which tried to link the Khaksar Tehrik with the German Nazis. Furthermore, members were prompted to raise questions in the Punjab Legislative Assembly about the activities of the Khaksar Tehrik. Sir Sikander himself stated in the Assembly that the Khaksar Movement was a communal Movement.<sup>9</sup> It was widely propagated that their activities were dangerous for peace between Muslims and non-Muslims. The Movement was said to be communal, despite the fact that the Tehrik was open to non-Muslims, and there were Hindus, Sikhs and others in the Khaksar Tehrik. Anti-Khaksar elements were asked to issue anti-Khaksar press statements to further create a justification for the ban.

The groundwork for imposing a ban on the Khaksar Tehrik was set. On February 22, 1940, a police raid was ordered, Khaksar material was seized, and prohibition was imposed on the

publishing of *Al-Islah*. Soon after this police raid, Mashriqi sought Jinnah's help to resolve the tangle with Sir Sikander. Jinnah did not come forward and instead said "I wish Sikandar could be my man. If it had been so I would have ordered him."<sup>10</sup>

On March 19, 1940, 313 Khaksars marched in protest in Lahore against Government actions; Punjab police, under the command of a British police officer, open-fired on unarmed Khaksars, and a tragic massacre took place. On the day of this tragedy, the Khaksar Tehrik was banned in Punjab, and Allama Mashriqi (who was in Delhi at the time), his sons, and a very large number of Khaksars were imprisoned. A police raid was also held at the Khaksar headquarters in Lahore. One of Mashriqi's sons, Ehsanullah Khan Aslam, was injured during this police raid and later succumbed to injuries and died on May 31, 1940. Mashriqi remained in jail for a long time; the Government of British India failed to bring any charges against Mashriqi and he was kept behind bars without a court trial. In 1941, the Movement was also banned on an all-India basis.

Quaid-e-Azam also promised to the public to help the Khaksars, and during the Muslim League Session (March 22-24, 1940), he stated, "...I assure you and my friends of the Khaksar organisation that we will not rest until we have got full justice..."<sup>11</sup> Regrettably, he did nothing serious for the release of Mashriqi or the Khaksars. Moreover, to the Khaksar circle, Quaid-e-Azam only appeared to be a supporter and well wisher of the Khaksar Tehrik in the public eye and not behind the scenes. In addition, one must not forget that Jinnah never mobilized the public or even visited Mashriqi in jail or his family, in order to avoid British resentment which might have jeopardized his political career. Quaid-e-Azam's luke-warm efforts were meant to circumvent public pressure, rather than assist the Khaksars, and offer proof that he was in support of the actions against the Khaksar Tehrik.

After the March 19<sup>th</sup> Khaksar massacre, ban on the Movement, and the arrest of Mashriqi and the Khaksars, daily Khaksar protests and demonstrations against the ban began. Linlithgow gave top priority to the matter and took personal interest to ensure that the Tehrik was completely crushed; this is evident from his correspondence with Governors and Secretary of State for India in London, including a secret letter (dated April 02, 1940) to the Governor of Punjab in which he mentioned the situation in Lahore, the "potentially dangerous character" of the Khaksar Tehrik, and that he wanted to address the overall matter as a priority.<sup>12</sup>

It is important to note that desperate efforts were made to wipe out the Khaksar Movement, yet it never died. In fact the more the Movement was suppressed, the more the demand for independence, in light of the ban on the Tehrik and Mashriqi in jail, was heightened. The political benefit of this was taken by AIML.

### ***Vested Interests***

The circumstances highlighted in this article shed light on the fact that the British and the Muslim League leadership were among the leading proponents behind the ban on the Khaksar Tehrik. Vested interests lay behind this move — in the face of a powerful Movement that posed a threat to British rule and the Muslim League's politics in India, both sought to secure their own control.

By putting Mashriqi behind bars and banning the Movement, the British averted the downfall of their rule in 1940. Instead they brought Jinnah to the frontline to start confrontational politics

with all parties (Muslims and non-Muslims). This gave a lifeline to the British to continue ruling India, and they were able to maintain their stay until 1947.

Quaid-e-Azam too wanted to ban the Movement. His political position at the time had been very weak, and the Khaksar Tehrik and Mashriqi were a direct threat. With Mashriqi in jail and the Movement banned, Jinnah sought to capitalize on the wailing masses, bring the Khaksars under the Muslim League flag, and emerge as the sole Muslim leader. With these circumstances and support from the British, Jinnah did gain tremendously and emerged as a strong leader over time. On the other hand, Sir Sikander, who had thought that by crushing the Khaksars he would secure his political career in Punjab, in fact suffered heavily. After the Khaksar massacre, he lost his popularity in the Muslim community, which Jinnah exploited to then secure his own power.

Mashraqi pointed out the role of the British and Quaid-e-Azam as well as the conspiracy against the Khaksar Tehrik. His press release issued on August 26, 1943 stated:

“19th [March, 1940] and the 26th July [1943, attack on Quaid-e-Azam] both were ‘well planned attacks’ on the Khaksar organisation, the one from the side of the Government and the other from the side of Mr. Jinnah.”<sup>13</sup>

It is evident that the British and the All-India Muslim League were behind the ban on the Khaksar Tehrik, for their own vested interests. Because the AIML played in the hands of the British (as stated by Mashriqi and various nationalists) and because of the AIML’s wrong policies, Muslims were weakened, deprived of their homeland, and left with a moth-eaten Pakistan. The partition scheme resulted in the massacre of over one million people, the ruin of millions of lives, and ever-lasting hostility among people who had lived together for centuries.

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<sup>1</sup> *Al-Islah*, Jan. 20, 1939. Vol. 6, Issue 3, pp. 7-8.

<sup>2</sup> India Office Library, The British Library, London. File: IOL MSS EUR F125/102, pp. 380-1.

<sup>3</sup> IOL MSS EUR F125/102, pp. 99-100.

<sup>4</sup> IOL MSS EUR F125/102, pp. 294-5.

<sup>5</sup> IOL MSS EUR F125/89, pp. 13-4, 34.

<sup>6</sup> IOL MSS EUR F125/89, p. 57.

<sup>7</sup> Governor of NWFP’s Report No.7, April 09, 1940, p. 29.

<sup>8</sup> Zaman, Sher. 1987. *Khaksar Tehrik Ki Jiddo Juhad* (Volume 2). Madni Clinic, Chah Sultan, Rawalpindi, Pakistan, Khaksar Sher Zaman, p.54.

<sup>9</sup> *The Tribune*, December 05, 1939.

<sup>10</sup> Hussain, Syed Shabbir. 1991. *Al-Mashriqi: The Disowned Genius*. Lahore, Pakistan: Jang Publishers. p. 127.

<sup>11</sup> *The Tribune*, March 25, 1940.

<sup>12</sup> IOL MSS EUR F125/89, pp. 22-3.

<sup>13</sup> Hussain, p. 193.

IOL: India Office Library, The British Library, London.

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**The above article appeared in the following newspapers:**

- *News from Bangladesh* dated March 18, 2008.

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<http://www.bangladesh-web.com/view.php?hidRecord=191564>

- *Pakistan Christian Post* (Philadelphia, USA) dated March 20, 2008.  
<http://www.pakistanchristianpost.com/articledetails.php?artid=528>
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<http://globalpolitician.com/24438-india>